

Abstract

Czechoslovakia during the Second World War – Influence of the Second World War on the political development of Czechoslovakia

The years 1938-1945 determined the development that culminated in the communist coup d'état in February of 1948. At the same time, Czech society was undergoing a deep crisis that has been caused by bitter disappointment of the end of the First Republic and its internal political problems.

The Great Depression, mass unemployment and the inability of government officials to deal with this situation satisfactorily led to dissatisfaction with the economic arrangement of the First Republic and became the subject of radical change. According to many, the First Republic political party system also had failed. Too many political parties, the need for coalition governments, selfish adherence to party interests instead of national interests, intrigues, were all given as reasons why democracy had not been able to confirm its primacy in the moments when it was most needed. Betrayal by the Western Allies, especially France (under the strong influence of Great Britain) and the relatively friendly behavior of the Soviet Union during the Munich crisis undermined foreign policy concepts, held in the interwar period.

All these events had meant that almost no one wanted to return to pre-war conditions. Not only cosmetic changes, but a fundamental and radical reconstruction of the internal political structure of the future state, as well as a major revision of foreign policy orientation was considered as essential.

The path, which further developed in the years to come, paradoxically, had indicated the steps taken at the times of the Second Republic. Reducing the number of political parties, no formation of others, calling for state and national unity, all that gave the idea that the state will play a much more significant role than ever before. All reforms were meant to build a better, so called "authoritarian democracy".

Outbreak of the war in 1939 allowed the radicalization and detailed elaboration of these concepts. There is no doubt that the democratic resistance, both at home and abroad, wished to maintain the democratic constitution of the Republic. It is equally beyond doubt that the vast majority of Czech society, thanks to the bitter realities of the First Republic, wanted such a radical rebuilding. If we want to judge, we should condemn the whole of Czech

society, not its democratic political leaders, who only programmatically expressed these attitudes.

It is far beyond the scope of discussion that the democratic tradition in Czech society took deep roots and the vast majority reported to it. This is the reason why the democracy was intended to maintain, but it should have been "improved". Liberal-democratic concepts should have been accompanied by a socialist economic program in the spirit of "economic democracy".

The development of the war accentuated traditional Czech sympathies for Russia (Soviet Union), which would henceforth be the main guarantor of the independence of the Republic and permanent bulwark against a possible threat from Germany. This fact can not be attached only to communist politics, Edvard Benes and the circle of his followers. Under the influence of the crushing disappointment of Munich, almost all segments of society (soldiers, intellectuals, middle classes) wished to become internationally reliant on Soviet Russia. However, there was the hope that independence and partnership would be respected.

Although it is possible to argue with these starting points, in my opinion, they can certainly be understood. Left-wing radicalism and the nationalistic wave (latently present in Europe at least since the Napoleonic wars) had gone through each of European countries and Czechoslovakia could not be an exception. On the other hand, it was the attitude of Czech society, which facilitated the Communist takeover. A convincing election victory in democratic elections in 1946 was only the culmination of the previous events. In the interest of national welfare and a better future Czechs accepted the people's democracy-building. On a political level, it was characterized by the restrictions of free competition of political parties. In the same spirit should have been conducted economic reforms, represented by the massive nationalization of industry, banking, services, financial and monetary systems. This program was only partly communist. The essential part of it was created by the democratic politicians seeking to build a new, better and safer country.

Although the developments during the Second World War were complicated, it was the Czechs themselves who submitted to an international forum their ideas requesting approval. These ideas were also based on domestic considerations and requirements, and were in compliance with the documents of the domestic resistance.